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SMOOTH TALK: ROUGH LESSON. A Film by Joyce Chopra

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Director Joyce Chopra has not only dramatically translated Joyce Carol Oates's "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" to film but has also pinpointed the horrid isolation alternating with the giddy excitement that characterizes teenage years of middle-class white females. Given the thoroughly specious nature of so many recent rites of passage films, Smooth Talk offers an astonishingly, even painfully honest, depiction of one 15-year-old girl caught in media res. It's an oasis among the desert of current offerings, but one which offers little if any escapist relief. Rather, and more importantly, within this film we recognize the male-female economy which seduces young women into accepting, even desiring, their own oppression in the process of socialization. Smooth Talk dramatizes this entry into our society as consumable product as well as consumer.

Smooth Talk begins with a shot of waves breaking on a beach, an appropriate metaphor for a transitional state. The camera pans right to discover the three girls, all legs and torsos. The shadows and the angle of the sun tell us they've fallen asleep a bit too long, and Connie awakens with alarm, another sharp signal for what's to transpire. The girls risk hitching a ride with a strange man so they can return to the shopping mall in time for one girlfriend's father to pick them up. Without forcing the issue too much, the entire opening sequence can be considered emblematic of the story to be told: the sexual awakening of Connie, the pickup by the off-putting man, and the patriarchal collecting at the end. But before we reach the climactic crisis of Smooth Talk, we get to know Connie, her family, and her friends, and in the process recognize an indictment of and maybe even resist an irresistible current in our socioeconomic

system. And Laura Dern's superb performance as Connie makes every nuance believable.

The first half of the film establishes Connie's world: the conflicts with her mother and her 24-year-old sister June, the days cruising the mall with her two girlfriends, and her exploration of an entry into sexuality. These scenes, developed by Tom Cole for the film and faithful to the spirit of the short story, stand out for their depiction of "normal" sterile consumerism and the teenage ebullience and excitement that enervates it. For example, the narcotic quiet and order of the mall is interrupted by Connie and her friends following, teasing, and running from the teenage boys they fancy. In one scene, they dart into a posh shop to escape the boys they've none too subtly ogled and addressed. They pretend to be very interested in buying some merchandise, only to be run out by the stern saleslady who instantly sizes up the situation. She doesn't want them back until they're ready to be real consumers. An adjunct of their sexual initiation is to consume, just as they are consumed. The first day at the mall Connie forgets to buy the paint roller for her mother, but she'll remember to get it on a subsequent trip, moving from neophyte to mature consumer, beyond the training bra stage.

The early scenes reveal the bond among the girls. At one point they stand in line for a movie. Three guys they've been flirting with signal the film they've chosen. When the shyest girl doesn't want to follow them, the other girlfriend asks Connie what they should do. She decides they just can't go to that one: it's all for one and one for all at this point. But as their sexual initiation progresses, the

shy girl drops out and Connie and her best friend go off on their own to pursue boys. Eventually, they too separate. A point is made of this: at the drive-in restaurant they must cross a dangerous road to reach, a negotiation equivalent to their crossing from innocent to more deadly turf. They move into the arena for posing and enticing the opposite sex. Though she's clearly enjoying the coy games that ensue, at first Connie hates to go off with a boy because it means leaving her best friend (Margaret Welch). Soon, however, she does and seems not to worry about it until she's stranded without a ride home by this same close girlfriend. Hiking home, Connie experiences the fright, anger, and pain of this abandonment and aloneness, one of the hardest things for her to tolerate as evident in several other scenes as well. We see that her socialization isolates her from her girlfriends. She must trade the ties with them for the games with the guys. This painful isolation is penetrated only by the ubiquitous rock music. Interestingly, in a scene in which Connie and her mother emotionally mirror each other, they mouth the same words to "Handy Man," who promises to fix broken hearts. But in this scene Connie is in the dining room, her mother is physically separated from her in the kitchen. What Connie will learn is the lesson her mother already knows: men don't repair broken hearts, they only cause them.

In the scenes in which Connie and her girlfriend visit the drive-in, Chopra captures their uncertainty and self-consciousness as well as the beckoning-but-frightening excitement of sexuality for the 15-year-old. As she flees from one boy who's kissing, hugging and attempting to fondle her in the front seat of his car, Connie says, "I'm not accustomed to getting that excited."

Other scenes between Connie and her parents are no less powerful. The attraction-repulsion between her and her mother are painful reminders of so many similar family relationships, just as the sibling rivalry pinpoints the complex emotional problems between sisters. June (Elizabeth Berridge) is no villain, but she doesn't help Connie either. She has already passed through

the initiation in which Connie is so confusedly engaged, and by virtue of her assimilation into the status quo offers Connie little solace. June seems already beaten by the system and yet a bit of a misfit herself, still living at home, not visibly dating, docile and obedient. In the short story, a point is made of her plainness and chunkiness in contrast to Connie's slim blonde beauty, the commercial ideal. Not so attractive as Connie, June has probably not been so vulnerable to predators such as Arnold Friend. More compassionate at the end of the film than she is earlier, June herself has found no comfortable, conventional niche yet has also lost any rebelliousness. In their different ways, both appear destined for the mother's numbed existence. She's been trying to paint the house, with which so much is wrong, for years but sees, as we do, how hopeless it is.

Her mother, played brilliantly by Mary Kay Place, lives the role that Connie is learning. In one discussion with Connie, the mother says, "Why do I follow the rules? Why can't I just say what I mean?" But she quickly slips back into the protection of her conventional role-playing and represses this momentary awareness of her own position. Of course the father (Levon Helm) does all he can to encourage traditional behavior. In one telling scene, he's a bit put out that he returns for dinner to find that they're only having cold tuna salad. The mother complains that it is too hot to work in the kitchen all day, but clearly he would prefer that she slave over the hot stove to reward and reinforce his importance. He's quite happy with the achievement of their middle-class existence. After dinner on the back patio he comments on his contentment, as banal as we perceive it (and perhaps much of our own) to be.

The film's tension builds imperceptibly but inexorably to the key scenes with Arnold Friend. Treat Williams captures Friend perfectly in his calculating, manipulative perverseness. The older Friend preys on the young Connie who is oblivious to the consequences of the game she's been playing. Friend isn't. Upon first seeing her at the drive-in, he tells her, "I'm watching you" and

points his finger/gun/phallus at her. In another scene, we view Connie from Friend's point of view, framing her through the windows of the drive-in as though she's captured in a glass cage. Connie notices Friend as soon as he drives down the gravel road to the house, but her curiosity is tempered first by caution and then segues and builds into alarm.

The only way Connie can endure the rape that Friend threatens and forces her into is to dissociate herself from her own body. The conclusion to "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" describes this dissociation. Dern visually and powerfully shows us the fear and paralysis that overcome Connie to take away her will, her self possession. Friend capitalizes on the marketing process we call socialization that prepares the teenage girl to enter adulthood divorced from herself. Connie moves into that world. As Friend says earlier, "I've been watching you" and "I'm gonna get you." Her father's house is no protection, as Friend makes clear, and the ever present rock and roll, which Connie blasts through the house, contributes its share to preparing her for the ritual she doesn't understand until its insidious conclusion is visited upon her. One shot makes it very clear: as Friend leans back across the trunk of his golden car, he is nothing more than a cunning head perched above a crotch.

Gratefully we don't see the rape itself; the tension that gradually increases and leads up to it causes enough pain. The conclusion, added to the film and absent from the story, doesn't lighten the impact either. Connie returns to her family's arms, welcomed and more in tune with them than she's been to this point, because now she too has accepted initiation into an undead existence in a system that has raised her as a commodity.

There's some debate about the merits or demerits this film should earn as a depiction of the punishment forced upon a sexually playful teenage girl. There's clearly disagreement over whether the film is reactionary or radical. There's little question that something is amiss with the audiences described in some reviews as laughing from the early mall scenes, meant to be amusing, through the conclusion, no laughing matter in any way. From my avowed feminist point of view, I suggest that based on Chopra's past sensitivity to women's issues, beginning with her and Claudia Weill's 1973 documentary *Joyce at 34* on Chopra's own pregnancy, I read the film as a perceptive, sustained, shattering condemnation of sexual victimization. With its elaboration of the connection to consumerism, it deserves all the praise it has received.



Film Feminisms: Theory and Practice.

By Mary C. Gentile

(Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985)

by J. Ronald Green, Department of Photography and Cinema, The Ohio State University.

The style of this book is rather modest and friendly, but its goals form a social and professional agenda second to none in priority. If film and television are a major part of our catechism today, which I think they are, and if women have been systematically used

by them in a proprietary way, which we all know they have, and if blacks, native Americans, the poor, and other disenfranchised groups (particularly people of the third world) have been either absent or totally appropriated by the media for the

use of dominant- culture storytellers, then this book is addressing the right questions.

Before I review Ms. Gentile's argument, I want to present what I think is its center. She uses the term "marginality" several times, and I would make even more of it. I think the issue of the "treatment" of marginal persons or cultures is among the least marginal of all social issues. We are said to live and work in a pluralistic culture, but in a rudimentary sense it is a culture operated by white men who tolerate other forms of life providing those forms conform to the rules, or at least don't interrupt the game. There is a dominant center and there are margins. Cuban filmmaker Sara Gomez showed in her superb film, One Way or Another, that her revolutionary society was also run by a dominant center of macho males which placed women, among other groups, in marginal positions relative to a marxist society. This issue is larger than, though not separate from, left and right.

What Gentile wants to do is move the experience of marginality into the very center of all experience, so that there is no "center" except pluralistically, there is no center except as a balancing of contradictions and differences, gaps and tensions. A wonderful passage from Film Feminisms shows how Gentile sees marginality as a healthy disease infecting all of us: "Any 'marginal' group experiences ... dissonance, be they women or men and women of color or the working class or the disabled or children or the elderly or gays and lesbians. I suggest, however, that individual members of the dominant class, race, sex, and so on, also experience such dissonance. Everyone is someone else's 'Other.' The dissonance may be less intense, easier to ignore, and may not threaten their basic survival in the ways it does for marginal groups." In an ingenious and moving argument, she uses the term "passing", from the world of black Americans, to describe a phenomenon Ronald and Nancy Reagan and their Yuppies might relate to best: "It does, however, trigger a defensive reaction. Those who 'just miss' the ideal will be more invested in presenting and defending it, in

disguising all signs of non-conformity and in 'passing.'" The fact that Ronald and Nancy Reagan fall just short of the ideal American "rulers" (e.g., Camelot was Democratic and the Kennedy wealth was greater and older), even the ideal movie-actor American (Reagan is no John Wayne or Cary Grant and Nancy is no Barbara Stanwyck or Katharine Hepburn), and that Yuppies are "upwardly mobile," i.e., still short of the ideal level of success, helps explain their avid defense of the ideal; they are "passing" as ideal (read "White").

For a reader thoroughly grounded in film theory this book feels a little thin. Gentile is directing her concerns at the deepest roots of film theory and feminist theory, and since this is her first book, it seems from time to time that her discussion is not as "referenced" or as aware of the full texture of history as one might expect for her depth of aim. Nevertheless, her aim is true.

At the center of Gentile's ideas is the concept of "critical subjectivity," her own term for a kind of ideologically-infused modernism, very close to post-modernism except that it is not limited to any set of styles or genres, nor to any sort of doctrine. She starts by calling attention to a commonplace of recent film theory, the notion that the attraction and effectiveness of cinema seems to be built around the audience's or viewer's identification with a character, issue, or situation represented in a film, and that filmmakers construct films to encourage and exploit identification, economically and ideologically. Imperfect matches in identification (e.g., I find myself admiring John Wayne's lonesome self-sufficiency, but if I think about it I wonder why he doesn't seem to know what loneliness really feels like) cause the dissonances discussed above (if I am "passing," I might ignore the dissonance and try to be John Wayne anyway, despite the loneliness). Dominant cinema has developed the attractions of identification into systems and strategies, such as the continuity system and the star system, which tend towards totalization of viewer entrancement/ entrapment in a single vision, a vision

constructed by white males of the first and second worlds, and by virtually no one in the third world, a world of color which is primarily a consumer of the white male vision.

Gentile's strategy for dealing with those strategies is the "critical subject." Feminists should make films and view films in ways which break down or break through the dominant totalizing identification systems. Filmmakers should refuse to present, and viewer/critics refuse to see themselves as, or lend themselves to film portrayals of, unique subjects. This is not necessarily an easy thing. We heroize others and ourselves, for example, in the interest of certain resistance movements – and in doing that don't we aggrandize the subject and invite intense identification? Gentile would advise against this strategy for feminists. Her advice reminds me very much of Robin Wood's call for a change in our society's celebration of desire for the phallus (the symbol of power and control) in his recent book Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan. Robin Wood is an avowed gay film critic who feels, as a result of his analyses of American popular films, that our survival depends upon each of us finding a less-repressed, less-oppressed life by loving and desiring the absence of the phallus, or in other words, loving and desiring the absence of control and power. I agree with Wood and Gentile on these points; I feel this is a key ideal for a necessary social change – the problem then remains where to find the lock in which to turn the key.

Gentile spends the middle of her book showing how two major classic film theorists, Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein and French Catholic critic Andre Bazin, mis-designed and mis-used this key. Eisenstein, though he created ideas and film techniques especially useful to feminists, wanted to control his audience like a behaviorist. And he willfully participated in

a top-down, bureaucratic regime (she is not referring to the later Stalin era here). Bazin, also the supporter of some ideas useful to feminists, was guilty of a non-critical attitude toward "reality" and appearances, and he appropriated unrepentantly the image of woman that best served his ideologically conservative project. I concur with her on all those points (though I feel Eisenstein and Bazin are both easy targets).

The last portion of Gentile's book is the payoff for her key ideas; it is here that she goes searching for locks to turn. She discusses four films by four feminist filmmakers, and in the process uncovers numerous promising tactics and strategies for the actual practice of the "critical subject," the practice of "film feminisms." She does not schematize these tactics and strategies, but I should think a summary listing would be useful. Her critical discussions make the reader want to see the films, to test again how their strategies work, on whom, and whether they are progressive.

This book could be used in women's studies, film studies, or even film production classes. It is a second-course level in cinema – one would want to have read and seen Eisenstein first – but it is not too advanced for the general reader. One would not want to use the last section in classes without being able to show some of the films discussed.

Gentile closes her theoretical chapters with a quotation from B. Ruby Rich, an excellent feminist film critic, which sums up the relationship of women to film: ". . .for a woman today, film is a dialectical experience in a way that it never was and never will be for a man under patriarchy. Brecht once described the exile as the ultimate dialectician in that the exile lives the tension of two different cultures. That's precisely the sense in which the woman spectator is an equally inevitable dialectician."



Dignity: Lower Income Women Tell of Their Lives and Struggles.

By Fran Leeper Buss

(Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1985.)

by Sally Meckling, Columbus, Ohio.

Oral history is a field in which there are more how-to books than actual have-done projects. Within this framework, Fran Leeper Buss's new book, Dignity: Lower Income Women Tell of Their Lives and Struggles is a pearl. In it, ten women are given a voice, a voice of discord and weariness that speaks frankly and without illusion of the repressions, the struggles, and the achievements of the 75% of poor people in this country who are women.

The use of oral history is a means whereby the everyday lives of people are documented, fleshed out, and exposed. The breadth and potential of oral history as social documentary, history, and literature is only beginning to be recognized. And, certainly women are in the forefront of this renaissance and re-vision.

Dignity has a broad scope. Buss's original intent was to produce a treatise much like Studs Terkel's Working, only hers would cover the work lives of lower income women. Instead, Buss has honed seventy-two interviews down to ten, each some twenty pages long. She covers a variety of topics, such as: ancestry, childhood, adolescence and menarche, marriage, family and motherhood, work, sexual harassment and rape, and other racial, sexual and economic issues.

For this reason, Buss's treatment is more autobiographical than historical and, in a sense, more akin to literary genre than an historical rendering. Though these stories certainly do not lack the trappings of social and cultural history, they are designed to read like stories, complete with forward plot development, setting, and dialogue. On this score, Buss is a deft editor, skillfully

composing these tales to make them direct, clear, and sententious, without sacrificing the colloquial voice of the teller. The stories are full of detail; they are dramatic and eye-opening and they speak well for the storytelling abilities of their narrators.

The text is introduced by two women, Susan Contratto, a clinical psychologist, and Buss herself. Perhaps an introduction written by a woman who received her doctorate from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education lends credence to a work already deemed marginal by literary standards. (After all, nobody wants to read stories about people's everyday lives, do they?) Nevertheless, I wonder if a social historian, a cultural anthropologist, or even a folklorist may have been more appropriate. Contratto explains that Buss renounces the old researcher/subject strait-jacket that has been plaguing psychologists for years, in favor of an approach that anthropologists and folklorists have been using for half a century, and labels this the new "qualitative feminist research." This research method is one that takes the totality of women's lives into account, and also recognizes that the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is not a static one, and that relationship will affect the outcome of the data. I also found Contratto to be generally derivative, rehashing those shop-soiled platitudes about nurturing and biological determinism, only this time within the cultural framework of poverty and destitution. Buss seems to have a better handle on her material's value and implications, as well as its strengths and frailties, though she does not analyze it in depth. This is unfortunate, considering this book is consistently referred to as a research

project. Buss provides us with short biographies and she understands the ramifications of being a white woman researcher in dialogue with women of color.

Buss's own reasons for attempting such a book are to "try to understand how individual women from different backgrounds experience the events common to most women", and "...what religious, philosophical, or ethical understandings underscore their courage, commitments and methods of confronting suffering, ideas of justice and efforts to change themselves and the world." The women in *Dignity* do vary greatly: economically, politically, ethnically, and in terms of their geographical location – so much so, one is unsure what the glue is that bonds them together. Of a total of ten women, one is Japanese American, one is of the Menominee Indian tribe, one is Hispanic, three are black, and four are white. We are not told how these women were picked out of the 72, only that they make up a broad sampling of this country's impoverished women. At first glance this diversity may seem too great, the scope too broad, sacrificing detail and cohesiveness. However, that diversity is the real strength of this book. *Dignity* is one of the first anthologies of its kind.

All of these women participate in a larger historical picture as well. Each story provides us with an encapsulated piece of American history. Mary Tsukamota along with 110,000 other Japanese Americans was uprooted and interned in relocation camps during the Second World War. Irene grew up on a Menominee reservation in Wisconsin; she remains one of the scant 20% of her tribe that did not convert to Catholicism as a result of numerous "re-education" schools. Maria Elena was a child when her parents worked first as shrimp fisherman in Texas, and then, later, as migrant farm workers in the North, hired cheaply during WWII to harvest sugar beets and potatoes for the war effort. Mary and Mildred are union activists fighting to install a union in one of the notorious J. P. Stevens textile mills. The history contained here is comprehensive; it is cultural, social, political, local, national, and familial. National

afflictions become family tragedies; the political, personal.

Buss's original design for this book to detail the work lives of lower income women is apparent; these pages are brimming with tales of back-breaking domestic, farm, factory, and "stoop-labor" – as Maria Elena calls the labor her family performed as migrant farm workers. They used hoes with stump handles, forcing them to stoop down to work so that "if they looked out across the field and saw that we were standing straight up, they thought that meant we weren't working." I was surprised at the number of women – nearly all of them – who worked the farm as children, or were raised, anyway, outside of an urban center. It becomes clear that for lower-income people, the migration to this nation's cities is a more recent phenomenon than once supposed. Many of the women are living in large cities as elderly women. But, we are told, that progression from country to city, from tenant farmer to subsidized housing dweller, has not meant their lifestyles have become mobile; often, the opposite is true. Mary, who worked side-by-side picking cotton with her parents and who now works in a textile mill in Montgomery explains,

I thought times were so hard back then, but now I think about it and I think about the problems I have now, and the ones I got now look like mountains compared to those. We had a lot of love, and there was plenty to eat, and not one of us says we ever went to bed hungry. I'd go back there any day now.

Dignity is not just social history or even literature, it is personal commentary on what it is like barely to live on the margins of a society whose margins grow larger with each new tax cut. These are women who, although they are powerful individuals who have used their personal power to effect transformations in their lives, still have had, as all poor people in this country, little forum for expressing their experiences. Despite these odds, the ramifications of *Dignity* specifically, and oral history generally, are tremendous.

Pill Popping: How to Get Clear.

By Valerie Curran and Susan Golombok

(London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985)

by Mildred B. Munday, Department of English (Emerita), The Ohio State University.

Pill Popping is a mildly feminist inquiry into the etiology of addiction to prescription drugs – especially valium and librium (tranquillizers). Dalmane and Restoril (sleeping pills), and sundry anti-depressants, including Elavil, tofranil, and Marplan – followed by brief descriptions of various kinds of therapy and an elaborate set of suggestions for diminishing and finally eliminating chemical drug dependency. The authors are psychologists at London University's Institute of Psychiatry in the Department of Psychopharmacology. (The title in the United Kingdom is, I am charmed to note, Bottling It Up – evidence, if any is needed, that Britain and the United States are more rapidly than ever approaching a point where translators will be required for effective exchange of the simplest of ideas.)

Pill Popping is directed toward the one woman in five identified by the authors as addicted to tranquillizers and/or sleeping pills. Twice as many women as men take tranquillizers, and twice as many women as men are addicted. The figures for antidepressants are even more startling: two-thirds of patients at risk are women. We are assured that the statistics are accurate for all major industrialized societies – not just Britain. In their concern to determine why women are particularly prone to addiction to prescription drugs, the authors draw on their observation of patients, on their research, and on the chaotic and controversial annals of current scientific literature. Their conclusions are not particularly surprising to anyone who has followed, even lightly, the ramified concepts of mental illness through the last century. Women's emotional disorders, previously attributed to diseases of reproductive organs, have come to be

considered the result of inner conflicts and repressions involving "roles"; pronouncements of gynecologists have given way to those of psychiatrists – still predominantly male, still prone to believe that women's symptoms are trivial, hysterical, or psychosomatic, if not governed by "raging hormones." Consider what happens when a man consults a physician with complaints of fatigue, sleeplessness, unrelieved gloom; nine times out of ten he gets a thorough and serious physical examination, conscientious follow-ups, and referrals to specialists. A woman presenting the same symptoms is likely to get a pat on the head (or knee) and a prescription for valium; if she tries another physician she gets another prescription – until tranquillizers and antidepressants become ends in themselves. She's physically and psychologically addicted, displaying, mutatis mutandis, all of the symptoms of substance abuse, including alcoholism.

The authors supply some drearily familiar case histories: women with too many domestic responsibilities, too few material resources, too frequent spousal absence or violence or indifference. Whatever the source of distress – patriarchal oppression, genuine physical disorders, genetically based emotional imbalance – tranquillizers, antidepressants, and sleeping pills (singly or in alarming combinations) are prescribed and prescriptions blindly renewed until addiction is added to already debilitating conditions. Extralegal drugs – heroin, cocaine, LSD, etc. – are ignored in this little book; perhaps these are beyond the authors' intentions or experience, or perhaps they are not perceived as constituting a critical problem in England, but I propose that the transition from prescription drugs to street drugs is frequent and very easy.

The authors of *Pill Popping* (or *Bottling It Up*, if you enjoy a pun) touch briefly and tantalizingly on some feminist issues: why women are particularly at risk in regard to prescription drugs, why women are especially vulnerable to the ravages of addiction, why married women are signally prone to addiction, how the patriarchal relationship between women and physicians encourages drug dependency. But if one is looking for definitive answers or acute feminist analyses, one does not find them here. Curran and Golombok observe: "The chances of being prescribed tranquilizers and antidepressants depend mainly on whether a woman is married, single, widowed, or separated, on whether she has a paid job, on how old she is, and on how much support she gets from her family and friends." Granted. Certainly recommendations for structural changes in society or at least in the medical establishment might follow, but what we get in the last third of the book is a how-to section: one paragraph descriptions of varieties of conventional and unconventional therapy (choose your own; all are presented as equally valid), and, finally, some detailed and rather simplistic recipes for a do-it-yourself cure. There are little tests to

take, little graphs to study and imitate, schedules for recording one's moods every fifteen minutes or so, elaborate rituals for omitting half a pill, then (gently) a whole pill, and at last a whole fistful of pills. The entire procedure seems, to this admittedly biased reviewer, so much like mindless busy-work that one might grab a few Valiums in sheer frustration. I am willing to concede that if the system, like the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous works, then it justifies itself. One would need to test it empirically. But, given a choice, I'd rather settle for Narcotics Anonymous.

Pill Popping, on the whole, is literate, generally compassionate, and certainly earnest. I looked for more depth and a more thorough feminist analysis, but the presence of these would have resulted in another, and vastly different, book. Still and all, \$7.95 seems a bit steep for a brief survey of female addiction along with an annoying collection of little questionnaires and minute instructions about breaking pills in half. The latter seems a bit too much like suggesting that an alcoholic have a "little drink" to help "taper off."



Transforming Body Image: Learning to Love the Body You Have.

By Marcia Germaine Hutchinson

(Trumansburg, New York: The Crossing Press, 1985)

by Meral G. Crane, Mental Health Clinic at Student Health Center, The Ohio State University.

Human societies have always been subject to ideals of bodily perfection which were not only unrealistic but which distorted and mutilated the normal human physical form. Women in particular have been subject to such socially imposed ideals: the bound lily feet of women in traditional China, the immense obesity of Bugandan women in pre-modern East Africa, and the corseted waists of nineteenth century women in

Europe and America immediately come to mind.

Such socially imposed distortions of the human form are, of course, hardly a thing of the past in our society. We live in a period of obsessive concern, particularly among women, with body image, obsessions which lead to disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, unhealthy

diets, and compulsive exercising regimens, all with the goal of reducing or redistributing body weight. Magazines aimed at women readers bombard us with a variety of advertisements for miracle drugs to curb appetite, exercise programs, or weight loss camps for our "overweight" children. Indeed, so extreme have these obsessions become in our society that it is not even unusual to hear or read of deaths among women, in particular, seeking to give physical expression to body images so distorted as to be fatally destructive to the human organism.

Marcia Hutchinson, creator of the Transforming Body Image Workshops, writes in her book from the perspective of therapist, a professor of counseling psychology, and a woman who has struggled to make peace with her own body. In the introductory sections of the book she emphasizes the importance of loving and accepting ourselves and feeling "beautiful" inside so that we also see our outer beauty. She insists that our efforts for self-improvement must be propelled by acceptance of who we already are and not by self-rejection. While pushing for acceptance, however, she rightly hastens to remind us that "accepting overweight is not the same as resigning yourself to it."

As a therapist I am constantly made aware of distorted body image problems, how not accepting our body-as-home affects our sexuality and relationships. I find myself truly alarmed by the impact of eating disorders engendered by the endless pursuit of the ideal body. And I feel the author speaks for many women who come to me for help, when she writes: "I spent most of my 43 years letting my body's imperfections taint my sense of the real person living inside. I used to look at my body and forget that inside there lived a kind, intelligent, and valuable human being -- me."

The author's own success story alone is a very convincing witness to the fact that the meditations and physical exercises she describes work. Hutchinson now describes herself with undeniable self-acceptance: "I am emotionally healthy, in control of my life. I

am healthy, strong, fit, supple, and graceful. And my life includes intimacy, friendship, meaningful work, and a life style of my own design. And I am overweight... most of the time I live in a state of truce -- I can enjoy my body and all the ways it moves me through life... I know that I am much, much more than my body -- my sense of my own worth is not attached to my body."

Beginning in Chapter III, the book consists of exercises, worksheets with soul searching questions on your body image, as well as "guiding words" for those who go through the exercises. The questions she asks us to ponder, discuss, or write responses to include: How do you characterize the women in your family? Do they seem to value their bodies? How do they take care of their bodies? What did you learn from them about your sexuality? What did these women teach you about how you feel about your own body? Which women have been important role models? What feelings come up for you as you contemplate your family as a group? A good example of the types of "guiding words" included in each chapter is the following: "Your degree of success or failure in finding and executing an escape from your trap is a good indicator of your degree of readiness to let go of negativity surrounding your body image. Some of you will be able to escape with ease... Some of you will get stuck at the stage of executing your escape..." Furthermore, when appropriate, she includes lengthy quotes from women who went through her Transforming Body Image Workshops. The participant reactions that have been quoted seem well-selected to encourage readers to join in the process of self acceptance, while also giving comfort in seeing reflections of one's own self doubt and questioning: "As Marie put it: 'It was fantastic to be able to play with my body image. I could see myself in so many different ways, rather than the one negative image that has been implanted in my brain.'" In chapters III through XI there are 22 exercises described that should ideally be used in the order they appear. However, I also feel that a reader who may choose the book for self-help could also benefit from exercises such as the mirror exercises, even if done out

of the order described in the book. Furthermore, all of these exercises along with the "guiding words" can be conveniently adopted by a self-help group of women who may decide to support each other through their efforts to transform their body image, using the guidance provided by the outline of this book, and by taking turns guiding the group. Similarly, therapists who deal with body image concerns can guide an individual client or a group, attaining good results. Hutchinson notes that the exercises in the book are available in a set of seven 90 minute audio tapes, and also suggests that readers could make their own tape by reading out loud and taping the "Guiding Words" and exercises to later use to lead themselves.

Perhaps my only criticism of the book has to do with Chapter VIII, "Who's Wrong With Our Body Image." Here, I feel the author gets unnecessarily analytical. She also seems to subscribe to the belief that we feel better only

after telling someone off or displaying dramatic anger, whereas current research supports Carol Travis who, in her book Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion, asserts: "Such views get people ventilating and agitating but they rarely recognize or fix the circumstances that make them angry in the first place." Spending effort in the more often than not futile quest to discover who or what caused one's body image unrest wastes time, diffuses a person's resolve to take the task seriously, and takes away energy from the task of change. Indeed, if most of Chapter VIII were simply omitted, it would not be as urgent for Hutchinson to caution that the book not be used without a professional's guidance by people with psychiatric disorders. Dwelling on discovering the villains further perpetuates the victim stance for women. It is clear that the victim stance will not help develop women's self-esteem which is so essential in order to take a solution-oriented approach to treatment and individual growth.



With Ears Opening Like Morning Glories: Eudora Welty and the Love of Storytelling.

By Carol S. Manning

(Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985)

by Elizabeth Evans, Department of English, Georgia Institute of Technology.

Although mindful that universality is the dominant theme in Welty scholarship, Carol Manning joins those scholars who see Welty's Southern roots as central to her work. Manning succeeds in arguing that Welty has a vision of the South, a vision that "is part and parcel of a broad unifying thread underlying her seemingly disparate works."

Specifically interested in analyzing how Welty depicts the oral culture of the South, Manning says that Welty's "love affair with storytelling" has shaped "virtually every aspect of her art." Within the tradition of

storytelling – whether in ancient myth or from the summer front porch rockers of Southern houses – Welty builds her fiction, portraying a society and a culture rich in "talkers and story tellers." Manning shows that this portrayal of the oral culture (characters indulging in sentimental and nostalgic story telling, romanticizing the past, creating their own family myths) emerges as a prevalent element in Southern fiction after the Civil War, evident in Stark Young's So Red the Rose, in works by Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter, and in Walker Percy's The Moviegoer.

While Welty shares much with these fellow Southerners, the singular traits that Manning identifies in Welty are significant. "Welty almost alone actually shows conversation to play a prominent role in her characters' lives"; she almost always writes the tale "in the natural, conversational language of its speaker or speakers" (the analysis of this point in Delta Wedding is excellent); Welty links "the oral tradition to the monotony of life" and creates characters who persistently succeed "in converting local happenings into engaging tales." If Welty allows her characters to embellish their past and populate their local terrain with mythic family heroes, she is also fully aware of her characters' illusions, a point Manning ably makes.

Manning is at her best in Chapter 5, "Hero-Making and Allusions to Myth," where she demonstrates the "hero-making as myth-making" in the early story "Asphodel" and the latter novels, Delta Wedding, The Golden Apples, and Losing Battles. She analyzes carefully, showing in each piece how Welty "explores and explodes the myths which we in general and the Southern reminisce in particular create." For example, in the end Mr. Don McInnis is not even a cousin of Dionysus or Apollo but, as Cora says, just a man – naked as a goat and old as the hills.

In this section, Manning's reading of The Golden Apples is a refreshing addition to the exhausting and exhaustive studies identifying and linking Morgana and its people to their mythic ancestors. Those characters who indeed are set apart from the ordinary folk – King MacLain, the orphan Easter, Loch Morrison, Virgie Rainey – lose their mystery which, in reality, has been created by the community and its own inherent desire to

have a hero. They are, for instance, fascinated by King's alleged exploits and romanticize them to the level of myth even though King is simply promiscuous, totally irresponsible, unheroic. Overall, Manning sees myth-making as a continuing process, remaining much the same throughout the centuries – a convenient but perhaps too-simple judgement.

Manning is least effective in her discussion of The Optimist's Daughter, a work that of course is not as centered in the storytelling tradition as Welty's other works. We learn little here about the novel that other critics have not already said.

Some flaws exist. Manning's study suffers from a good bit of unnecessary repetition and one regrets occasional infelicities in diction ("Andrewses"; "unsubtle"; and "deliciously" in this sentence: "The oral tradition has shaped Welty's narrative voice extensively and deliciously"). Manning deserts the apt and homey "storyteller" for the fancier "raconteur" four times within two pages, a substitute that is distracting. And the conclusion – barely ten pages – is disappointingly brief. Perhaps the preceding eight chapters are enough to make the case, but in the conclusion Manning shifts her emphasis ever so slightly from the beginning: she shifts from Welty's vision of the South as a unifying theme throughout her fiction to the intertwining of oral and written tradition from Homer to the American South.

Never mind. Manning's study is a substantial contribution to Welty scholarship and she is to be applauded for her sensitive and careful ear. She has distinguished the variations of storytelling and in doing so shows how these stories reveal narrative and narrator, a skill that is particularly Welty's.



Letters to May.
By Eleanor Mabel Sarton
Selected and Edited
by May Sarton
 (Orono: Puckerbush Press, 1986)

*by Margaret Cruikshank, City College of San Francisco
 and Center for Research on Women, Stanford University.*

May Sarton's many devoted readers will recall glimpses of her mother in her autobiographical writing. Eleanor Mabel Sarton was an artist in her own right, not merely the wife of a famous scholar. Letters to May is valuable both for its portrait of the author and for suggestions of the nurturance she was able to give her daughter. Few distinguished writers, I suspect, are as lucky as May Sarton to have had the free and joyful love of a deeply creative mother. In one letter, Eleanor Mabel Sarton says that she intends to encourage freedom in her daughter because she values her own highly. This book helps us understand May Sarton's fiercely independent path through life. She was clearly empowered by her mother.

Most of the letters date from the 1930s and 40s. They detail domestic life in Cambridge rather than the inner artistic life of their author. Sadly, she seems aware that in subordinating herself to her husband, who was ornery, difficult, and oblivious to her needs, she did not fully develop her own creativity. But this is a feminist interpretation taken from between the lines of the text. The author explicitly says she has found her happiness through her husband's life and her daughter's. Some information about her work in design appears here, however.

This book is beautifully produced. The shape is unusual; nearly a square. It is a pleasure to see thick paper used in a book. The beautiful cover is based on a design by Eleanor Mabel Sarton.

Pornography: A Feminist
Survey.
By Margaret Smith
and Barbara Waisberg
 (Toronto: Boudicca Books, 1985)

*by Ruth Ann Hendrickson, Department of English,
 The Ohio State University.*

Feminist educators Margaret Smith and Barbara Waisberg annotate in this brief bibliography 51 articles, collections, and books relating to pornography, which they define as "sexual imagery which present the human subjects as only sexual objects for the use of the viewer." Smith and Waisberg are interested in the way that pornography "presents a particular definition of women and sex as a universal norm." The authors divide the entries into four sections: Sexuality (historical and social contexts); Social Construction of Perception (gender questions); Perspectives on Pornography (anti-porn campaigns); and Control of Pornography (censorship). The survey is recent (the earliest entry is 1970, the latest 1985), popular (entries include articles from Ms., Harpers, Mother Jones, and several Canadian publications), and selective (51 entries). The annotations are intelligent and useful. The major drawback of this little booklet is its ambitious attempt to survey such an exhausting topic. Limiting the text to a "feminist survey" does not seem to help, for the authors do not indicate if this means that they are listing works by feminists or of concern to feminists or that as feminists they are working from a particular perspective.



Books Received

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